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Testimony to the Human Services Committee

In Support of HB-6465, An Act Concerning Purchase of Service Contracts.

February 10, 2015

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Patrick Johnson, Interim Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits), and I would like to share my support for H.B. 6465, An Act Concerning Purchase of Service Contracts. This bill asks the Governor and legislators to appropriately fund private nonprofit agencies by including an increase, commonly referred to as a cost of living adjustment, in all future Purchase of Service (POS) contracts and Medicaid fee-for service accounts consistent with the average annual growth of the Consumer Price Index or inflation. This increase in funding is necessary because the state has failed to adequately fund private nonprofit agencies for the last two decades.

I've been coming to this building for over 40 years advocating for people on the margins of our society. I have a strong personal interest in services for people with disabilities and their families. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities are a particular interest because I have two brothers in law who are disabled. Both are blind and one is profoundly intellectually disabled and autistic. He is currently 64 years old and in an Oak Hill group home. He had resided in Southbury Training School for over 40 years.

I am increasingly disturbed by the history of chronic underfunding of the private nonprofit sector by the state of Connecticut. The vast majority of employees in these agencies have not had a raise for up to seven years nor that met or exceeded the CPI in almost 25 years. State funding has been virtually flat for that same duration. Family members and advocates have been reduced to the level of surrogate beggars coming before you to rattle our tin cups on an annual basis and be told there is no money. It is increasingly apparent that what the state is doing is shifting the cost to charity and benefits to Medicaid and food stamps by forcing direct care staff into poverty and keeping them there. I do not begrudge state employees their wages nor do I begrudge the recent increases to appointed leaders but I do ask that you act to halt this feudal system of unjust distribution of tax dollars to benefit one class of provider only to treat others in a heartlessly unjust manner. Employees of nonprofit agencies pay taxes, and vote, and constitute a substantial part of the state economy. What you are doing is suppressing economic growth.

This practice is demoralizing for support professionals and others in the private nonprofit sector and results in unsafe conditions when staff are falling asleep on the job because they have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. When tragedy occurs the state then blames the private agency and the direct support staff when all of us are to blame. Stop for a minute and try to imagine if the state had an increase in revenue for the past 20 years of less than 1% per year and yet you expected state employees to work for reduced wages and benefits over 20 years.

I urge you to address the unmet needs of people with disabilities and their families and those in the private sector who support them and I urge you to treat contracts with private nonprofit agencies the same way you treat contracts with those who build our roads. This bill begins to do that by requiring the actual cost of services contracted to be included in contracts. You would

never think of cutting those [road and bridge construction] contracts with work in progress or asking them to charge virtually the same as 20 years ago yet the state practice sends a message that the disabled and those who serve them are last in line with no assurance that anything will be done. The nonprofit sector has been asked to do more with less for too long and now all that remains is less with less because there is nothing more left to give. So here I am back before you rattling the tin cup once again in the hope that the reasonable, the rational, the just, the moral and ethical, and cost effective will prevail.

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